

Jonathan was proudly serving in Afghanistan—a family proudly serving this country.

Ramona is the glue of the Senate Frist staff family, and she is an extension of my own family. When we first moved to Washington, she reached out, she helped Karyn and me and our three boys, Bryan, Jonathan, and Harrison settle into a new city, a new city we had spent no time in at all. She has watched my three sons grow from three young boys to three young men.

Ramona, you have kept my life organized for 12 years. You have faithfully served your country in the Senate for 27 years—27½ years. And you have done a tremendous, tremendous job.

Thank you, Ramona, for sticking with us all these years. Thank you, and we love you.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Louisiana.

THANKING STAFF WHO WORKED ON THE GULF OF MEXICO SECURITY LEGISLATION

Ms. LANDRIEU. Mr. President, I wanted to just take a minute. I spoke before the vote and thanked many of my colleagues for their extraordinary work on passing the Gulf of Mexico security bill, which Senator DOMENICI led and so many of us helped. But I did not have an opportunity at that time to thank so many staff people who put their heart and mind and spirit into this action, which is really a historic accomplishment for the State of Louisiana and the gulf coast.

This effort goes back 9 years, and there are many staff people who contributed. I want to read into the RECORD and mention some of the Energy staffers who worked with me over the years, and legislative directors and chiefs of staff who have helped make this possible: Dionne Thompson, Ben Cannon, Jason Schendle, Tom Michels, Elizabeth Craddock, Kathleen Strottman, Jason Matthews, Janet Woodka, Adam Sharp, Rich Masters, Norma Jane Sabiston, and my current chief of staff, Ron Faucheux.

There were many other staffers on the committees, from both sides of the aisle, who helped to make this bill possible. But in the Landrieu office, none of this would have gotten done without the people who just worked tireless hours, year after year, through victory and defeat, through disappointments and setbacks, to keep their eye on the ball to make this historic bill that is going to do so much to help the southern part of our State, the entire State, and the whole southern part of the United States, to gain its footing, to rebuild, to restore these wetlands, and protect some great infrastructure for America.

So I want to thank my colleagues, particularly Senator FRIST and Senator REID, for their work in guiding us to victory tonight. Thank you.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maine.

POSTAL ACCOUNTABILITY AND ENHANCEMENT ACT

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, shortly, the Senate will consider H.R. 6407, the Postal Accountability and Enhancement Act. As the Presiding Officer is very well aware, since he has been a key player in molding this important legislation, this postal reform legislation has been a long time coming. And it is great news for the U.S. economy.

This legislation represents the culmination of a process that began back in 2002 when a group of constituents came to me, sat down with me in Maine, and taught me the importance of the Postal Service to the viability of their businesses and to the employees they had.

This coalition of groups included a Maine catalog company, a paper manufacturer, a printer, a local financial services company, and a publisher. They all came together and it was from them that I learned just how vital the Postal Service is to our economy.

So shortly after that meeting in the summer of 2002, I introduced a bill to establish a Presidential commission charged with examining the problems of the Postal Service and charged with developing specific recommendations and legislative proposals that the Congress and the Postal Service could implement.

The President appointed the members of the commission. They worked very hard. They came up with an excellent report which provided, in many ways, the basis for the landmark legislation that I believe we will finally clear tonight.

During the next 4 years, the Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, which I had been privileged to chair, worked very hard to craft the most sweeping changes in the U.S. Postal Service in more than 30 years.

Senate passage of this legislation will help the 225-year-old Postal Service meet the challenges of the 21st century.

As a Senator representing a large rural State, I want to ensure that my constituents, whether they live in the northern woods or on our islands or in our many small rural communities, have the same access to Postal Services as the people of our cities. If the Postal Service were no longer to provide universal service and deliver mail to every customer, the affordable communications link upon which many Americans rely would be jeopardized. Most commercial enterprises would find it uneconomical, if not impossible, to deliver mail and packages to rural Americans at the affordable rates charged by the Postal Service.

But for several years now, the Postal Service has clung to the edge of an abyss. Under the business model in

which it has been forced to operate, the Postal Service has been at great financial risk. In fact, the Government Accountability Office aptly describes it as a potential death spiral in which escalating rates lead to lower volume, which in turn leads to even higher rates, which in turn causes the Postal Service to lose more business.

The Postal Service faces the challenge of the electronic age. It also has been saddled with more than \$90 billion in unfunded liabilities and obligations, which has included debt to the Treasury, nearly \$7 billion to workers' comp claims, \$5 billion for retirement costs, and as much as \$45 billion to cover retiree health care costs. The Comptroller General of the United States, David Walker, has cited these figures to point to the urgent need for "fundamental reforms to minimize the risk of a significant taxpayer bailout for a dramatic postal rate increase." And it is telling, indeed, that the Postal Service has been on GAO's high-risk list since April of 2001.

With this landmark reform legislation, we will put the Postal Service on a firm financial footing. We endorse the principle of universal service, of affordable, predictable postal rates. This legislation will modernize the Postal Service's rate-setting process and provide much-needed rate predictability for postal customers. Without this reform, postal ratepayers would have faced billions of dollars in higher—much higher—rates over the next several years.

The 750,000 career employees of the Postal Service often labor without anyone really knowing who they are, but their efforts play an absolutely essential role in the American economy. The Postal Service is the linchpin of a \$900 billion mailing industry that employs 9 million people in fields as diverse as direct mailing, printing, catalog companies, paper manufacturing, publishing, and financial services. The health of the Postal Service, therefore, is essential to the vitality of thousands of companies and the millions of employees they serve.

This bill represents years of hard work. As chairman of the committee with jurisdiction, I held a series of eight hearings, including a joint hearing with our House colleagues, during which we reviewed the recommendations of the President's commission and we heard from a wide range of experts and stakeholders, including representatives of the postal employees unions, the Postal Service itself, administration officials, mailers, the postmasters, postal supervisors, publishers—a wide variety of groups. In fact, there is a broad coalition supporting this bill, including many nonprofit mailers, which rely on affordable postal rates.

There are many people who have worked very hard to craft the very delicate compromise that is before us tonight. I particularly thank Senators CARPER, COLEMAN, and LIEBERMAN for